

Message Text

SECRET

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T AMMAN 06533

EXDIS

FROM ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, JO, LE
SUBJ: TALK WITH HUSSEIN ON LEBANON

1. IN OUR MEETING AUGUST 12, KING HUSSEIN AND I HAD A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON.
2. I EXPLAINED THAT WE REGARD THE SITUATION AS VERY SERIOUS BOTH IN THE SOUTH, WHERE THE PROBLEM OF MOVEMENT OF THE LEBANESE FORCE WAS STILL UNRESOLVED, AND IN THE BEIRUT AREA, WHERE A CYCLE OF PROVOCATION BY THE CHRISTIANS AND RESPONSE BY THE SYRIANS THREATENED TO EXPLODE INTO UNCONTROLLED ESCALATION. I TOLD HUSSEIN THAT THE SECRETARY HAD SPENT CONSIDERABLE TIME ON THE LEBANON PROBLEM DURING HIS VISIT TO ISRAEL; AMBASSADOR LEWIS HAS BEEN WORKING HARD TO GET THE ISRAELIS TO RESTRAIN THEIR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AND AMBASSADOR PARKER HAD BEEN URGING RESTRAINT ON THE CHRISTIANS IN BEIRUT.

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I SAID WE SUPPORT SYRIA'S OVERALL POLICY IN LEBANON AND APPRECIATE THE PROBLEMS THE SYRIANS FACE BUT WE DO BELIEVE THEIR RESPONSES HAVE BEEN DISPROPORTIONATE TO THE PROVOCATIONS.

3. I SAID THE SITUATION IS MADE THE MORE DANGEROUS BY A GROWING CONCERN IN ISRAEL THAT SYRIA IS OUT TO

DESTROY THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON. I MADE CLEAR THAT WE DO NOT SHARE THIS ISRAELI PERCEPTION, BUT OUR DIFFERENCE OF VIEWS WITH THE ISRAELIS DID NOT CHANGE THE FACT OF THWKR PERCEPTION. THE DANGER IN SUCH A SITUATION IS THAT ISRAEL MIGHT TAKE CERTAIN STEPS AND UNCONTROLLED ESCALATION COULD FOLLOW. I SAID I HAD NO PROPOSALS TO MAKE BUT WE WONDER IF A WAY COULD BE FOUND TO HAVE A DISENGAGEMENT ON THE FIRING LINE. I ADDED THAT I WANTED TO MAKE CLEAR THAT I WAS NOT TALKING ABOUT A WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES FROM LEBANON.

4. HUSSEIN SAID HE SHARED OUR CONCERN OVER LEBANON BUT DID NOT SEE HOW THE PROBLEM WAS GOING TO BE RESOLVED "THERE ARE SO MANY FACTORS INVOLVED." HE REMARKED THAT JORDAN HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE CHRISTIANS (READ CHAMOUNISTS) IN THE PAST AND HAD SUPPORTED THEM BUT NOW HAD CUT THESE TIES. JORDAN SUPPORTS SYRIA'S PRESENCE IN LEBANON; "THEY ARE THERE TO KEEP PEACE." HUSSEIN SAID "WE WILL DO ALL WE CAN" TO HELP RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF LEBANON BUT DID NOT OFFER ANY SPECIFIC IDEAS.

5. HUSSEIN SAID SYRIANS HAD TOLD PRIME MINISTER BADRAN, WHEN HE WAS IN DAMASCUS RECENTLY, THAT THEY WERE CONSIDERING BREAKING RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. BECAUSE OF THE CONGRESS' ACTION ON CUT OFF OF AID TO SYRIA. HUSSEIN SAID HE HAD STRONGLY ADVISED AGAINST THIS AND
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HAD TOLD THE SYRIANS SUCH A STEP WOULD "BE DISASTROUS." I EXPLAINED THAT THE CUT-OFF ACTION WAS TAKEN BY THE HOUSE ALONE AND THAT THE SENATE HAS APPROVED AID TO SYRIA. I POINTED OUT THAT THE HOUSE ACTION HAD BEEN OPPOSED BY THE ADMINISTRATION, AND THAT THE SECRETARY PERSONALLY HAD MADE A STRONG REPRESENTATION IN FAVOR OF AID TO SYRIA, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE HOUSE ACTION WOULD CAUSE PROBLEMS IN OUR EFFORTS TO GET THE FULL SYRIAN AID REQUEST RESTORED. SUDDARTH

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